

# **Native Oyster Restoration**

## Talking Points

- NOAA's long-term goal is to restore harvest and nonharvest areas to allow the oyster resource to be selfsustaining, while maintaining a viable commercial fishery.
- Since 2002, more than 550 acres have been restored or reconditioned in Maryland and Virginia with NOAA funding.
- NOAA is helping to rebuild the native oyster population by creating the functional, high-quality, hard-bottom habitat that once existed throughout much of the Chesapeake Bay, typically by uncovering or planting oyster shell. The shells are then seeded with spat to jumpstart the natural system's ability to restore its function.
- A portion of the historic oyster bottom area should be restored and set aside as non-harvest broodstock areas. Other areas should be available for other use—in 2004, three areas in Maryland were opened for controlled commercial harvest.

## Background

- The oyster is a pivotal organism in the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay. Oyster reefs provide habitat for crabs, mussels, clams, finfish, and many invertebrates.
- Oyster reefs—once so large they at times posed hazards to navigation—provided a filtering system for the Bay, as well as food and habitat for a variety of other commercially and recreationally important species.
- Overharvesting, habitat destruction, pollution, and disease have reduced oyster populations to less than one percent of historic levels.
- NOAA's financial and technical support of oyster restoration has grown from one project in 1995 to more than \$4.1 million at more than 24 sites in 2004.